

IPIB Monthly Column

September 1, 2021

QUESTION: How do I request copies of public records?

ANSWER: Iowa Code chapter 22 governs the request and release of public records. An individual may request a copy of a public record in person, by telephone, in writing, or electronically (fax, email, text).

Sometimes people think requesting answers to questions is the same as requesting a public record. It is important to specify that your request is for a record. Questions are about the “who, what, when, where, why, and how” of government operations. A public record request asks for copies of specific records, documents, tapes, or other information, stored or preserved, belonging to the government body.

Instead of submitting a question (“Did the city spend money for park maintenance?”), a record request would ask for “copies of all records concerning park maintenance costs.”

The Iowa Public Information Board has a sample letter on its website that can assist you in drafting a record request. While Iowa law does not require that you use a form or submit a record request in writing, submitting a request in writing often leads to less confusion in determining what records are being sought.

Did You Know that the Iowa Public Information Board staff is available to assist you with questions or problems involving open meetings and public records in Iowa? During the month of August 2021, 75 contacts were made with the Iowa Public Information Board office.

TYPE	August 2021
Formal complaints	17
Advisory opinions	4
Declaratory orders	0
Informal complaints	8
Informal requests	37
Miscellaneous	9
TOTAL:	75

Board Members

Joan Corbin • E. J. Giovannetti • Barry Lindahl • Keith Luchtel • Monica McHugh
Frederick Morain • Julie Pottorff • Suzan Stewart • Stan Thompson

Who can contact the IPIB and how long does it take? Any person can contact the IPIB for assistance by telephone (515-725-1781), by email, or on the IPIB website. So far in 2021, 494 identifiable people have contacted the IPIB. Of these, 261 were private citizens, 178 were government officials or employees, and 55 were members of the media. In 2021, 70% of the incoming contacts were resolved the first day, 13% were resolved in one to five days, and 17% were resolved in six or more days. Opinions, rulings, FAQs, reports, and training documents are available on the IPIB website – www.ipib.iowa.gov.